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C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 000922

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO EUR/NCE AND TO NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/20/2015

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SUBJECT: BULGARIA: PRESIDENT PURVANOV CONFIRMS TRIP TO
LIBYA ON MEDICS

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Levine, DCM. Reason 1.5(b)

11. (C) Summary: President Georgi Purvanov will travel to Libya later this month to raise the case of the Bulgarian medics. According to his staff, the President has tentatively scheduled the trip for May 27-28. During the visit, Purvanov plans to meet with Qadhafi and the medics in Tripoli and then travel to Benghazi to visit the hospital there. He does not intend to meet with any of the families suffering from the AIDS outbreak.

12. (C) In a discussion with Presidential Adviser Zlatin Trapkov, the DCM raised the political risks of the trip and advised it be carefully staffed in order to predict the possible outcome of each event. Trapkov admitted this would not be likely, calling the trip a "shot in the dark," but one the President wanted to make before the May 31 court review of the medics, death sentences. According to Trapkov, Purvanov will not be presenting any specific proposals to the Libyans. Purvanov will be accompanied by adviser Georgi Dimitrov, and possibly staff from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Trapkov said a member of the delegation might want to meet with the head of our Liaison Office in Tripoli, but that all logistics and appointments will be handled by the Bulgarian Embassy there.

13. (C) Comment: While this is a potentially risky venture for Purvanov, he should not be considered a loose canon. Purvanov is a smart, polished politician who generally does well with the media/public and is able to project interest and empathy. Barring an embarrassing encounter with the victims, families or other public diplomacy fiasco, the trip will likely garner positive attention here as another example of Purvanov's responsible leadership. Whether the real motivation for the trip is the May 31 court date or the approaching parliamentary elections (June 25), Purvanov's decision to travel now comes after months of consideration. We have raised several concerns with the Presidency regarding the trip including its effect on our trilateral effort, the danger in opening multiple lines of communications with the Libyans, Qadhafi's unpredictability and the general risk of embarrassment - but Purvanov appears determined to travel.